

Fasting e-Course:

1: intro

2: what is fasting? (what isn't fasting?)

3: disciples fast, Ezra fast, Samuel fast

4: Elijah fast, widow's fast

5: Paul fast, Daniel fast

6: Esther fast, wilderness fast

7: closing

Listening to this song, and a line says,
“The devil wants to extend the game: free throws”
For some reason, that line stood out to me.

Wikipedia says that a free throw is an “unopposed attempt to score points, generally awarded after a foul on the shooter by the opposing team”

But y'all tell me: how do I get a free throw in basketball? Free sounds good to me - free sounds like I am getting a chance to shoot a ball, unopposed. How do I make this happen, or how does it come about that I end up at the free throw line?

It happened because someone broke a rule, right? Simplest terms, I know - if I ever tell you I am prepping for a serious sit-down with Michael Jordan about free throws, teach me something a little deeper about it, okay? If we are playing more serious basketball than a pick-up game here at the church, help me out - there's probably some strategy involved, maybe there's times that you commit a foul on purpose to break the other team's rhythm, something, but for a simple idea today: someone did something that they should not have done, and I got a free throw: a chance to shoot the ball, unopposed.

Close enough?

I learned that the free throw line is also called the “charity line”, so I had to look that up too - again, I'm guessing about the connection between these stats and the word “charity”, but listen at this (probably a bunch of stuff that y'all already know - I didn't know any of it):

- Each successful free throw is worth one point
- Free throws are generally successful - an NBA player hits about 70-80% of free throws

So if I get fouled while I am attempting to shoot a basket in the usual course of the game, I'll get free throws.

Again, I'm talking about the simplest terms and most convenient definitions, but - as a player, I don't want to “foul” a member of the opposing team because it could result in giving them free throws - 1, 2, 3 points at anywhere between (worst case scenario) 50% chance of success to (best case scenario) 90% chance of success. A gift to the opposing team: 3 points, and I was the one who gave it to them.

Charity line - good name.

When that team wins by 1, 2, or 3 points, I'm going to feel responsible. No one ever said, "*nah, that wasn't a win - it was only 1 point, doesn't count*". The W is the W - we're going to take it!

I learned something else about the free throw: it's not only worth points, it's worth TIME. The clock literally stops while we set up the procedure for the free throw. Teams line up, they have to be in specific spaces on the court (you gotta give me credit for knowing "foul line", "charity line", and forgive me for not knowing the rest of the lines). Ref hands the ball to the shooter, shooter gets 10 seconds before the ball has to leave his hands, clock starts once the ball is "back in play".

Maybe it was only seconds, big deal. Those seconds become HUGE when you lose.

Maybe it was only 1 point, big deal. That point becomes HUGE when you lose.

If the opposing team gets a free throw, they are in charge of the game and in possession of the ball for those seconds. That's HUGE.

If the opposing team gets a free throw, the odds are in their favor for those seconds. That's HUGE.

Circling back: the line in that song makes a little more sense to me now: "*the devil wants to extend the game: free throws*" - he's your opposing team, and he wants to control the game.

The devil is the opposing team.

I'm hesitant to blame things on the devil, I don't like giving him that much credit. Sometimes it's just life - but we do need to be aware that we have an enemy. The Bible says that he is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The amplified version translates 1 Peter 5:8 this way:

*"Be sober [well balanced and self-disciplined],
be alert and cautious at all times.*

*That enemy of yours, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion
[fiercely hungry], seeking someone to devour."*

Paul often says the most important thing first: first, YOU be well balanced and self disciplined, YOU be alert and cautious at all times. That's first.

Why is this important? Because you have an enemy - an opposing team - continually seeking ways to destroy you.

We can have a victorious life in Jesus, we can win against the devil - over and over and over, God promises victory:

"Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." 2 Corinthians 2:14

Always, always.

We know that we have more than a possibility to be victorious -

it can be a guarantee -

BUT WE HAVE TO RECOGNIZE THAT THERE IS AN ENEMY

THERE IS AN OPPOSING TEAM

WE HAVE TO BRING OUR A-GAME

WE HAVE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FIGHT.

The variable here is us and the disciplines we develop or fail to develop in our spiritual lives.

There are foundational disciplines that we need to develop in our lives. There are a series of things that we need to be practicing if we are going to be victorious in our lives.

If we are going to win, we have to stop giving the devil free throws.

For us, these are fouls:

1. Failing to pray (men ought to always pray and not lose heart Luke 18, when you pray Mt. 6)
2. Failing to serve or give (when you do a charitable deed, Matthew 6:3)
3. Failing to read the word (study to show yourselves approved 2 Tim 2:15)
4. Failing to attend church (forsake not the gathering of the brethren Heb 10:25)
5. Failing to worship (John 4:24, Hebrews 12:28)
6. Failing to take a Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11)
7. Failing to engage in spiritual friendships (Proverbs 17:17)
8. Failing to operate in the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)
9. Failing to love (our faith works by love Gal 5:6)
10. Failing to fast (when you fast, Mt 6)

For us, we can be ACTIVE or we can be PASSIVE. All the devil has to do is stop us from doing these foundational disciplines, and he controls the game.

Unfortunately, he has us deceived. We think that skipping these things buys us time, we might even think that skipping these things carries some sort of exchange-able benefit to us. Not so.

You didn't have time to pray? You didn't create time for yourself - you created time and opportunities for the opposing team. The devil got a free throw - seconds of controlling the game, odds in his favor, 50%-90% chance of getting a successful shot in.

You couldn't afford to give? You didn't create more for yourself - you created time and opportunities for the opposing team. The devil got a free throw - seconds of controlling the game, odds in his favor, 50%-90% chance of getting a successful shot in.

You didn't have time to love? You didn't create more love for yourself - you created time and opportunities for the opposing team. The devil got a free throw - seconds of controlling the game, odds in his favor, 50%-90% chance of getting a successful shot in.

We have to be consistent with these foundational disciplines - get the odds in our favor, experience the benefits that God intended for us to have.

THE BIGGEST ROADBLOCK TO FASTING IS MISUNDERSTANDING WHAT IT IS.

What's the first thing that comes to your mind when I say "fast"?

Possibly Jesus' 40 day fast. We put a lot of emphasis on it, and rightfully so - IT WAS POWERFUL. However, the devil has us deceived in this too, because I hear a lot of excuses when it comes to this important foundational discipline.

One of the devil's specialties is making the Word of God seem so extreme it couldn't possibly be true or practical or applicable to our real life.

He did it in the garden to Eve: "Did God really say you can't eat of the fruit?"

NO, GOD DID NOT REALLY SAY THAT. God said that they could have everything but one tree. His first trick - and we are still falling for it.

With fasting, somehow we are convinced that if we don't do a 40 day fast, we aren't fasting. Not true.

And there are so many types of fasts, so many different reasons and different ways to fast, we don't even know what we are saying no to.

Free throw.

In lesson 2, we'll discuss exactly what a fast IS and also what a fast is NOT.

LESSON 2: What is a fast?

A fast is dedicating time to your relationship with God. A fast is a means of drawing closer to God. A fast is pushing away something that your flesh craves in order to embrace something that your spirit craves.

A fast will sharpen your senses. A fast will heighten your spiritual sensitivity. A fast will bring about answers to prayers that will not be answered in any other way. A fast will strengthen you. A fast will bring you victories you didn't think were possible. A fast will draw you closer to God.

No wonder the devil wants us afraid of a fast. No wonder the devil wants our minds to jump right to: no food or water for 40 days and you will end up in the hospital because you have a physical condition.

Free throw.

A fast is NOT:

Some kind of cruel diet that will make you sick. God doesn't want that for you - he wants you healthy. By His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5, 1 Peter 2:24) - He went to extreme lengths for your health and wholeness, and now the devil has you thinking that God has changed His mind about healing and now wants you to involve yourself in a discipline that will make you sick.

Do you think that God is unaware of your physical limitations? Do you think that in setting this example He was purposefully asking us to do something that would hurt us? No, never - God is love and everything He leads us to will in fact bring us closer to Him.

Isaiah 58 says:

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen:

To loose the bonds of wickedness,

To undo the [c]heavy burdens,

To let the oppressed go free,

And that you break every yoke?

7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

And that you bring to your house the poor who are [d]cast out;

When you see the naked, that you cover him,

And not hide yourself from your own flesh?

8 Then your light shall break forth like the morning,

Your healing shall spring forth speedily,

And your righteousness shall go before you;

The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

9 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;

You shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’

“If you take away the yoke from your midst,

The [e]pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,

10 *If* you extend your soul to the hungry

And satisfy the afflicted soul,

Then your light shall dawn in the darkness,

And your [f]darkness shall *be* as the noonday.

11 The Lord will guide you continually,

And satisfy your soul in drought,

And strengthen your bones;

You shall be like a watered garden,

And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

12 Those from among you

Shall build the old waste places;

You shall raise up the foundations of many generations;

And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach,

The Restorer of [g]Streets to Dwell In.

All these benefits, no wonder the devil doesn't want us to do it.

Did you know there is a learning curve with a fast? You don't start with 40 days-no-food-no-water.

Someone just thought, "*Maybe I don't have to start there, but if that's the goal, I might as well not start anywhere.*"

No, a 40 day fast is not the goal (and there's the devil, trying again to take his free throw with an extreme).

We're not trying to achieve a milestone, we're trying to gain intimacy with God - and Jesus' fast in the wilderness was one of many types of fasts.

Let's expose the devil's lie. A fast is an important spiritual discipline. It is foundational, and it is expected. Jesus says in Matthew 6 "When you fast" - I don't think He meant these things to be extra credit for the super spiritual. We all need these foundational disciplines.

I hear a lot:

Well, I can't because I have diabetes.

Well, I can't because I am gluten free.

Well, I can't because I have this disorder.

Well, I can't because....

Are you saying that you were created to be in disobedience? That sounds harsh, but that's what it is when we create a roadblock to obedience in these spiritual formations.

The thing is, that most of the time we are rejecting the fast right out of hand and we don't even really know what it is. As soon as we hear "fast", what the devil translates to us is: "40 day fast" or "21 day fast" or "starvation" or "diabetic coma" and none of that is what it is. In our minds, we go right to this extreme things that it was never meant to be, and we throw out the idea altogether - free throw.

Let's look at a few kinds of fasts in the Word in the next few lessons!

Lesson 3: disciples's fast, Ezra Fast, Samuel Fast

1. **A disciple's fast: Hebrews 12:1.** "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"

This is a fast that frees you from addictions to sin. These are things that hinder us and ensnare us from drawing closer to God. What might you give up during a disciple's fast?

- a. Social media?
- b. Television?
- c. Alcohol?
- d. Your phone?
 - i. *Man, that weekly report can be a wake-up call!*
- e. What is the thing that you spend more time on than you spend time with God? What is the idol that you have created that might be taking God's place?
- f. What is the negative health benefit to giving that up? Expose the devil right now - tell him he's a liar and get that free throw back. Whatever your insert-the-name-of-your-disorder-here is, there's not a negative outcome to a disciple's fast.

2. **The Ezra Fast: Ezra 8:21** "Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions.

This is a fast to protect your belongings or finances, asking God to protect what He has entrusted to you. Even includes your "little ones". Don't you need wisdom from the Lord to steward your blessings well? What can you give up during an Ezra fast?

- a. Unnecessary spending?
- b. Starbucks?
- c. Comfort you might find in shopping? (Miami - get my mind off my trauma by shopping)
- d. What is the negative health benefit to giving that up? Expose the devil right now - tell him he's a liar and get that free throw back. Whatever your insert-the-name-of-your-disorder-here is, there's not a negative outcome to an Ezra fast.

3. **The Samuel fast: 1 Sam 7:3** "Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, *then* put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you"

This is a fast for national revival. Put away foreign gods. What can you give up during a Samuel fast?

- a. Anything that you have allowed to take the place of God in your life - foreign gods
- b. Anything that leads you to rely on self rather than God

Lesson 4: Elijah Fast, Widow's Fast

In lesson 3, we went over the disciples's fast, Ezra Fast, Samuel Fast. We haven't talked about food yet!

4. **The Elijah Fast: 1 Kings 19** "as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an [b]angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise *and* eat." **6** Then he looked, and there by his head *was* a cake baked on [c]coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. **7** And the [d]angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise *and* eat, because the journey *is* too great for you." **8** So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God. And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord *came* to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" **10** So he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." **11** Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, *but* the Lord *was* not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, *but* the Lord *was* not in the earthquake; **12** and after the earthquake a fire, *but* the Lord *was* not in the fire; and after the fire [e]a still small voice.

This was 40 days total, but stay with me. **This is a fast for emotional health.** Elijah was a suicidal wreck. Jezebel has threatened his life, he's depressed, he's afraid, he's hiding.

This was a fast for strength, because Elijah was unable to do the next thing in his own strength. Have you ever been there? What would you give up for 40 days to not be there any more? This is not an unfamiliar story - most of you have heard it before, but some of you may have glazed right over the fact that Elijah's word from the Lord and strength came FOLLOWING a 40 day fast. Sometimes, these things really do only come out by prayer and fasting.

5. **The Widow's Fast: 1 Kings 17:10-16** "when he (Elijah) came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow *was* there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink." **11** And as she was going to get *it*, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." **12** So she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a [a]jar; and see, I *am* gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." **13** And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go *and* do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring *it* to me; and afterward make *some* for yourself and your son. **14** For thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.' " **15** So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for *many* days. **16** The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah.

The widow's fast is a fast about meeting the needs of others. The widow served the prophet before she served herself. This is about putting the needs of others before your own needs. What can you give up during a widow's fast?

- a. Something you love for the benefit of someone else?

- b. An evening at home with Netflix, so you can spend time with someone who is lonely or going through something difficult?
- c. An “extra” for you so someone else can have a necessity?
- d. How about giving up the scarcity mentality that you and I have talked about so many times before - trust God to take care of your needs so you can take care of someone else’s needs
- e. What is the negative health benefit to giving that up? Expose the devil right now - tell him he’s a liar and get that free throw back. Whatever your insert-the-name-of-your-disorder-here is, there’s not a negative outcome to a widow’s fast.

Lesson 5: Paul fast, Daniel Fast, Esther fast

In lessons 3 and 4, we went over the disciples’s fast, Ezra Fast, Samuel Fast, Elijah Fast, Widow’s Fast. This time, we are going to talk about food items, but stay with me!

6. **The Paul Fast:** Acts 9:9, 18-19 “And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank”, “he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened”.

Acts 27:33-34 “as day was about to dawn, Paul implored *them* all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. **34** Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since”

This is a fast for direction, wisdom, assurance. In a Paul fast (like so many of the others), there is not a specified time. “Take nourishment SINCE” and once he received his sight he also received food.

Since signifies the desired outcome - since they had heard from God that they would make it safely through this storm, they will eventually make it to their destination of Rome, the fast could end.

How many of you have a situation where you need direction, you need wisdom, your need assurance again that you will be okay? What can you give up during a Paul fast? What can you push away so you can make more room for God?

Beyond needing direction, what are you willing to fast/sacrifice UNTIL you receive your answer? Patience has not ceased to be a virtue - be willing to hang on until you receive the promise.

7. **The Daniel Fast:** Daniel 10 “In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. **3** I ate no [b]pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.”

This is a prolonged fast, about health and healing. The Daniel fast is also about drawing closer to God through prayer. Daniel, in his captivity, was surrounded by an evil society who did not serve the living God. Sound familiar? In Daniel 1:15, “And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies.”

What are you going to give up during a Daniel fast?

- a. Meat
- b. Alcohol
- c. Bread
- d. Sweets
- e. What is the negative health benefit to giving that up? Expose the devil right now - tell him he’s a liar and get that free throw back. Whatever your insert-the-name-of-your-disorder-here is, there’s not a negative outcome to a Daniel fast.

Lesson 6: Esther fast, Wilderness fast, closing

8. The Esther Fast: Esther 4:16 - “gather all the Jews who are present in [a]Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!

This is a fast for physical protection, possibly corporate, but that doesn't mean that you can't do it alone. It is a total fast, and it is for 3 days....

There is Jesus' fast in the wilderness - a fast before going under attack, a fast before walking out the purpose that you know the Lord has set before you. It's just not the first thing you are going to do. It isn't fasting 101. You'll start small - and maybe you'll end at the 40 day fast, and maybe you won't.

Could you do with any of these benefits?

Can you see how this discipline could strengthen you?

Can you see why the devil wants you to believe it fasting will hurt you?

Do you notice it wasn't at all about food?

In closing:

What a fast really is, in the simplest terms and most convenient definition: a fast is a trade. A fast is pushing back something so you can create space for something more important.

A fast is turning down the volume on your flesh and turning up the volume of the voice of God.

A fast is getting quiet and slowing down so you can breathe and see what's important.

What will you give up, for a short time, in order to experience the benefits that you so desperately need in your life?

Learning curve:

My children fasted when they were small: special drinks and eating out
THERE WAS VALUE IN THAT.

Tell the devil that he's a liar right now - because he wants you to think that if it isn't a 40 day total fast it isn't valuable. He wants you to think that God wouldn't honor this or even celebrate a step toward Jesus.

He wants you to say no before you even start - he wants a free throw.

We've discussed the

1. Disciples's Fast
2. Ezra Fast
3. Samuel Fast

4. Elijah Fast
5. Widow's Fast
6. Paul's Fast
7. Daniel Fast
8. Esther Fast
9. Wilderness Fast

Of these nine (and there are more), you've got an inroad to fasting in at least one of them.

Please consider God as your father - liken that relationship to the one you have with your child, or the one that you have with a parent (either the one you have or the one you wish you had): what do you do when your child tries something new?

YOU CELEBRATE, and God does too!

When your child calls and tell you that your grandchild has taken her first steps.... You don't say, "Hey, call me back when you've run a 5k, kid - what do you want, a party for those measly first steps?"

Give yourself grace. I promise that God is giving you grace too - grace originated with God, He created it, He has nothing but grace for you.

I think fasting is an important foundational discipline. I think overlooking it or counting it as extreme is a win for the devil.

When you do these foundational things (including fasting), the odds go in YOUR favor. YOU control the game. The seconds on the clock are YOURS. The devil has to stand still while you set up your shot.

"and thanks be unto God who always leads us in triumph"

You win :)